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STATE FOR EAP/CM, INR/EAP, and EEB/CIP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [KWWW](#) [SOCI](#) [EINT](#) [KEMS](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: CHINESE BLOGGERS CONFERENCE MORE DIFFICULT TO
ORGANIZE WITH EACH PASSING YEAR

Ref: A: 08 BEIJING 4522
B: 09 BEIJING 1970

GUANGZHOU 00000645 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Goldbeck. Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: It can be tough being a blogger in China. But try gathering dozens of bloggers from all around the country for a conference and then you'll face some challenges. The 5th Annual China Blogger Conference faced numerous obstacles from the initial planning stages right up to the last day of the event, according to organizers. Bloggers attending the conference, held in Lianzhou, Guangdong Province from November 7-8, discussed the meaning of this year's theme, "Micro Actions Broaden the World," shared know-how on scaling China's Great Firewall to access blocked content, and hailed Twitter as the best online communication tool today even though it has been blocked in China since June 2009. (Note: Septel will report on bloggers' views of the current and future role and influence of the Internet in Chinese society. End note.) End Summary.

"Chased Away" to Lianzhou

2. (C) This year's conference was held in a fourth-tier city in the mountains of northern Guangdong because the conference was "driven out of large cities," said Wen Yunchao (aka Bei Feng, strictly protect), a prominent blogger and one of the conference's organizers. The annual event had government support for the first conference five years ago in Shanghai. Subsequently, it was held successfully in Beijing, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou. However, each year, the conference has become harder to plan and organize than the last, Wen lamented, saying that fellow organizers had approached the governments of Xiamen and Haikou, only to be turned down because they apparently viewed the conference as too sensitive and high profile. (Comment: The Xiamen government may have been particularly sensitive to the issue given recent arrests in Fujian of bloggers who reported police inaction and possible corruption in regards to the alleged gang rape and murder case of Yan Xiaoling. End comment.)

3. (C) Another organizer, Mao Xianghui (aka Isaac Mao,

strictly protect), also commented to ConGenOff that many obstacles stood in the way of the event this year. Specifically, he said that organizers were unable to nail down the details because they had to wait until mid-October for the 60th anniversary National Day celebrations to be over before making any final plans and announcements. Publicity about the event was very low profile this year. News about the conference was mainly disseminated by word of mouth. Two postings were posted on the Internet at "<http://www.cnblogs.com/con/blog>" and "<http://www.geekcook.org>", but the latter, which included logistical information, was blocked or deleted after only a few days. Additionally, Mao told Beijing PolOff that the organizers had tried to get Zeng Jinyan, a blogger and AIDS activist, to participate either in person or via video conference but it was not possible. (Note: Zeng's husband, Hu Jia, is an AIDS, environmental, and human rights activist. The couple aggressively blogged about alleged harassment by officials and frequent house arrests. Hu was sentenced to three and a half years in prison in April 2008 for "inciting subversion of state power." Since Hu's imprisonment, Zeng has continued to blog about life under house arrest with a husband in jail. End note.) Mao said that he hopes to have Zeng's entire family, including their young daughter, at next year's conference.

14. (C) According to Wen Yunchao, he and other conference organizers settled on Lianzhou because Wen had good relations with the city and was able to secure the support of the city's largest economic players -- Lianzhou's two main tourist destinations. Wen told ConGenOff that, as a consequence, the local government allowed organizers to register the conference and to hold the event at the Lianzhou Underground River tourist site. (Comment: Lianzhou government support for the

GUANGZHOU 00000645 002.2 OF 004

conference appeared to have been largely influenced by economic factors in addition to Wen's apparent good relations with the local government. The conference attracted a large number of people to little known Lianzhou for two to three days, and likely put the tiny city on the map for the greater blogosphere audience. End comment.)

Keeping a Low Profile

15. (C) The conference attracted about 150 participants from all over China this year, well short of the 300-plus participants last year. Attendees however were not made aware of the event's start time and schedule until the eve or morning of the conference, many attendees told ConGenOff. Organizers did not previously post or hand out agendas at the conference, making announcements regarding each day's activities as the event progressed. On the first day of the conference, Wen Yunchao and Mao Xianghui told ConGenOff that they had more controversial topics planned for the end of the second day, but they would have to run it by the local government that night. "If the government is not comfortable with it, we are prepared to cut the conference short," explained Wen. Mao also shared that in order to avoid scrutiny, organizers tried to diversify the topics discussed at the conference, including an emphasis on civil society. Several hours were dedicated to showcasing small grassroots civil society organizations with an online presence. Representatives from these organizations ranged from student groups to social entrepreneurs who hoped to use the conference as a marketing platform. Conference organizers appeared particularly cautious this year in an attempt to keep the event as low profile as possible, but this may have also contributed to the impression that the event was not well organized.

16. (C) Despite attempts to avoid attention, the conference was monitored closely by local authorities. Besides local government officials, 40 local police officers were also

present at the conference site, claimed Wen. He said that while most of the officers remained outside the actual venue, one or two plain clothes officers penetrated the conference and recorded the event. Multiple attendees identified for Beijing PolOff and ConGenOff a middle aged man whom they claimed was an undercover security officer. Multiple attendees were observed to use Twitter to inform others of the movements, location and appearance of the supposed infiltrator. The presumed plain clothes officer took pictures and video of conference presenters and participants. However, Wen Yunchao expressed that he was glad they did not disrupt the conference, speculating that it was likely because he had been forthcoming with the authorities by providing them with a name list beforehand of sensitive individuals who would be in attendance. Wen also commented that local police officers with whom he spoke said they did not understand the presentations made at the conference.

"Micro Actions Broaden the World"

17. (C) The theme of this year's conference was "Micro Actions Broaden the World," or the idea that small actions taken by individuals can together change the world, explained keynote speaker Hu Yong (strictly protect), an associate professor at Beijing University who researches Internet media. Asking the audience "if there is no criticism, how can you talk of 'constructivism,'" Hu emphasized that every individual has a responsibility to voice their thoughts, and the Internet gives people the right to speak, which he called "a kind of freedom." The idea that small actors can do something grand was also raised by Mao Xianghui, who pointed to the conference volunteers and organizers as an example of this in practice. Both Mao and Wen commented that they were not the leaders or center of the conference, saying that the conference each year comes together organically in large part due to the efforts of many people connecting on the Internet and offering to contribute. However, based on conversations witnessed by

GUANGZHOU 00000645 003.2 OF 004

ConGenOff and Beijing PolOff during the conference, both Mao and Wen were major players and decision makers this year.

Blogger Conference, aka Twitter Conference?

18. (C) A show of hands at the conference in response to one presenter's on the spot survey revealed that the online communication tool of choice among attendees was Twitter. According to conference goers, there are many ways to access Twitter and other blocked sites. A 20-minute presentation was dedicated to equipping participants with tools to access Twitter. (See paragraph 12.) ConGenOff and Beijing PolOff witnessed many attendees "tweeting" while at the conference. "It is the biggest Internet movement in China today, so if people want to understand China, they can use Twitter," said David Feng (strictly protect), a self-proclaimed avid Twitter user who has attended the blogger conference multiple times. Although the government appears determined to block Twitter, bloggers agreed that there was no way the Chinese government could or would completely deny access to Mainland netizens determined to use Twitter because there is no effective way of doing so, short of completely shutting down the Internet. They argued that such a move would be too high an economic cost for the government to bear.

19. (C) Twitter was again widely discussed during two other sessions. Zui Hulu (pseudonym, strictly protect) led a session on social reporting during which he listed the essential tools for a "citizen reporter." Zui relayed his experiences in publicizing the June Nankang furniture protests (ref B). Besides emphasizing the need to have a "public sense," he said that one must also be technically prepared by having a mobile phone with online capabilities; knowledge of

how to scale the Great Firewall; and a Twitter account so one can disseminate the information to millions. In another session, Twitter was hailed as the tool that helped free Guo Baofeng (aka Amoiist, strictly protect), who was detained in July ostensibly for commenting on an alleged gang rape. Guo, joining the conference through live video from his home because his legal status prevented him from leaving Xiamen city, shared that when he was detained, it was his ability to log onto Twitter via his mobile phone and send messages to his online contacts, many of whom he met while attending previous blogger conferences, that made it possible for netizens to initiate a "mail to jail" campaign to free him. (Note: Netizens sent postcards to the detention center where Guo was held. Each postcard read, "Guo Baofeng, Your mom is telling you come home for dinner." According to those familiar with the campaign, the large volume of postcards likely pressured the local authorities to release Guo. End note.) Commenting on this incident, Mao said that the Guo Baofeng incident is the perfect example of "micro actions" working together to achieve a greater goal.

Scaling the Great Firewall

¶10. (C) The conference included a 20-minute presentation on the various tools one can employ to break through the Great Firewall and access blocked sites like Twitter. Led by Zhou Shuguang (aka Zuola, strictly protect), the presentation touched on proxies but mainly focused on ways to access Twitter. Zhou directed interested users to his website (<http://www.zuola.com>) to obtain a list of frequently updated IP addresses that can be used to gain access to Twitter. For users of mobile phones with online capabilities, he recommended installing the international versions of DABR, UserWeb, or Opera Mini browsers and interfaces. Zhou also made suggestions on how to use Twitter within a particular type of browser. For example, he said that one can install the Twitter Fox plug-in, a FireFox extension, to use Twitter within FireFox. Zhou rushed through his session due to time constraints, but many conference participants approached him afterwards to obtain more detail.

GUANGZHOU 00000645 004.2 OF 004

Unprecedented Venue Inspires Conference Organizers

¶11. (C) Held outdoors at the entrance of a large cave that houses the Lianzhou Underground River, the conference site was impressive, but not without its difficulties. Large groups of tourists heading to the cave often interrupted the conference and disrupted the audio quality. PowerPoint presentations prepared by the speakers were ineffective because outdoor light was not ideal for projecting visuals. There were also snags in video conferencing plans with Hong Kong supporters when the network stopped working.

¶12. (C) Despite these challenges, the conference continued as scheduled, said the organizers. As a bloggers conference, Internet connectivity was a must, said Wen. He noted that just having connectivity at the mouth of a cave in a fourth-tier Chinese city was a noteworthy achievement in itself. He also stated that he and his fellow bloggers would likely find unique and symbolic venues in the future to demonstrate the power of the Internet. (Comment: This was likely another way of saying that conference organizers will have to be more creative in the future given the expected ongoing government scrutiny. End comment.)

¶13. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Beijing.

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